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ABSTRACT

Intended for teachers in Tasmania, this booklet discusses the importance of providing well chosen books for children at an early age. The booklet suggests that from the earliest years, in home and school, the young child needs a supply of books that are read aloud by adults who encourage the child to talk about the story and the child's experience of the world. The booklet also suggests that during shared investigation of a story the child comes to learn how to handle a book and how books are organized. Chapter titles include: (1) The Imaginative and the Informative in Children's Books; (2) Beyond Initial Reading: Developing the 'Reading' Child; (3) Late Primary Years: The Range Is Immense; and (4) Poetry for Children: The Pleasure of Language. Numerous black and white photographs illustrate the text. (MG)

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Children and Language

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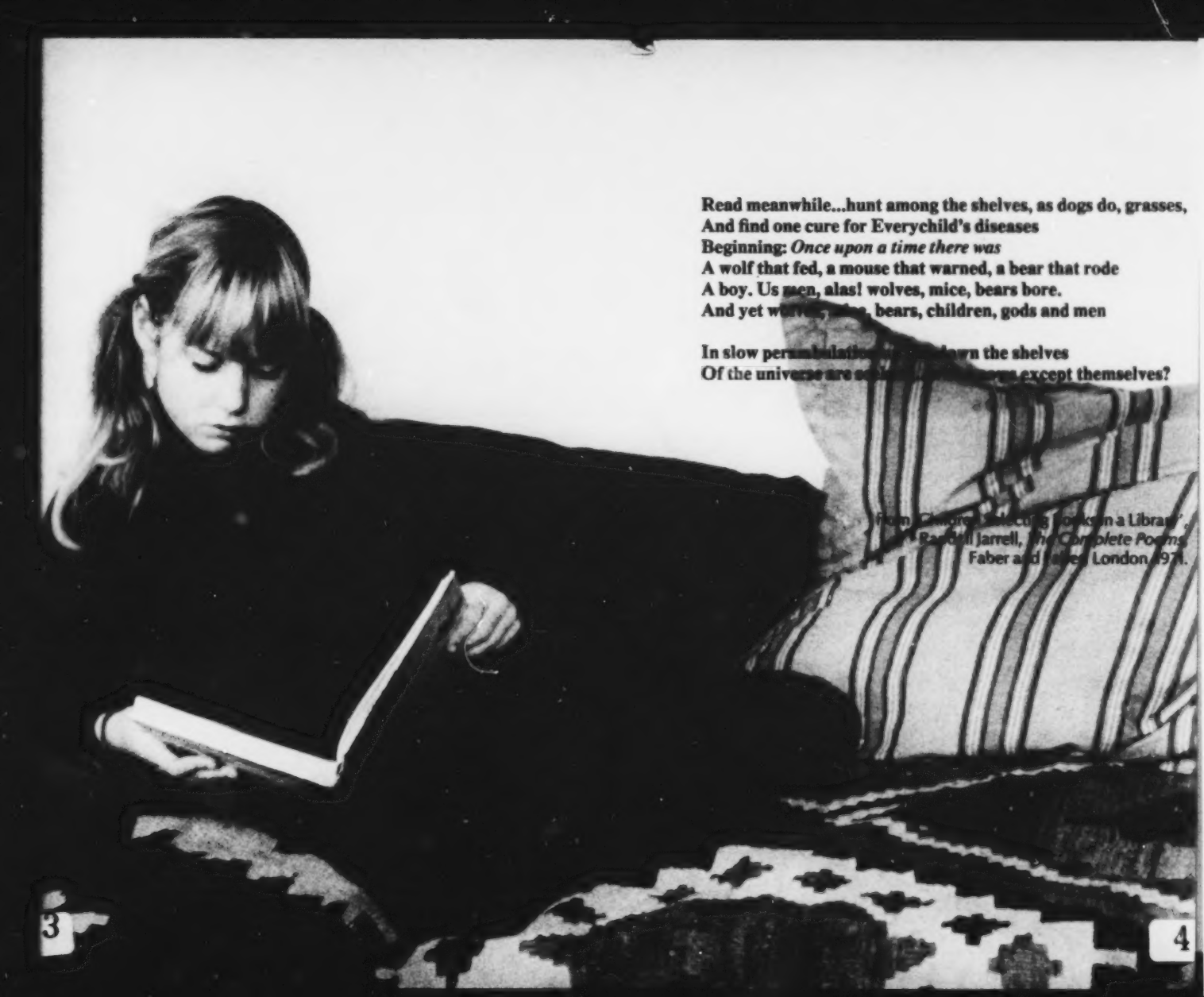

Read meanwhile...hunt among the shelves, as dogs do, grasses,
And find one cure for Everychild's diseases
Beginning: *Once upon a time there was*
A wolf that fed, a mouse that warned, a bear that rode
A boy. Us men, alas! wolves, mice, bears bore.
And yet we[illegible], mice, bears, children, gods and men

In slow perambulation[illegible]down the shelves
Of the universe are [illegible] except themselves?

From 'Children Selecting Books in a Library' by Randall Jarrell, *The Complete Poems*, Faber and Faber, London, 1971.

Children and Language
CHILDREN AND BOOKS

Education Department, Tasmania

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Introduction

Children brought into contact with books from their earliest days come to delight in them if the books are used to provide opportunities for the adult and child to enjoy each other's company. With the help of well-chosen books the adult can pass on an understanding of the world. A well-chosen book matches a child's interest, ability and experience so that a child is encouraged to enjoy books and to read further.

In reading books children are induced to think imaginatively and thus extend their experience. From the world's shelves, children can gain the chance to move beyond the limited circle of their own life. In books, too, children find examples of language used in ways that add to their understanding and appreciation of language.

While all books, however indirectly, say something about the world, there are books that are specially designed to store and transmit information, instructions and records. Such books provide young readers with examples of how information can be organised, stored and displayed. Reference and information books vary greatly in the demands they place on the reader, but if they are well chosen they initiate the child into many of the ways to investigate the world systematically.

In the early years especially, most books are story-books. In them, the child finds stories about the world as it is commonly experienced, as well as stories about imaginary worlds that stimulate the imagination. From 'story worlds' children can gain insights into the lives of others and so understand themselves more fully. When they become involved with well-chosen stories children learn the names of human emotions and begin to understand a great deal of what they mean. Through the stories they hear or read, especially when they share and discuss them, children add to their understanding of what society values or has valued. From stories and discussion, combined with their continuing experience of their community, children develop an understanding of their own set of moral values.

Stories in books place demands on a child that are different from those made by film and television. In these media so much is realised for the child but, in the written story, the reader has to participate more actively to recreate the story world and the characters from the author's words. The written story encourages the child to live more fully.

Everyone enjoys stories, and young children are no exception. They delight in stories told and read to them. Both story-telling and reading bring the child into contact with language used in more extended forms. They also introduce the child to the patterns of narrative.

From the earliest years, in home and school, the young child needs a supply of books that are read aloud by adults who encourage the child to talk about the story and the child's experience of the world. During shared investigation of a story the child comes to learn how to handle a book and how books are organised. The adult can, in an

easy and supportive way, draw attention to the conventions of print, illustration and general layout so that the child recognises the parts of a book, the way to interpret illustrations and how to look at print. More importantly, the adult who accompanies a child in encountering picture and story-books can help the child into an active participation with the author's or the artist's work so that the child learns how to seek to make meaning from the book.

Young children return to the books they have enjoyed. They take pleasure in revisiting the pictures and saying the words they have heard and remembered. Indeed, they often 'read aloud' words of well-loved stories with the knowing inflection of an adult reader.

When children revisit story-books they have heard and discussed with adults, they add to their active vocabulary. They add to their experience of story pattern and increase their capacity to anticipate how a story will turn out. A child who reads to confirm an anticipated outcome has added a crucial skill to the act of reading.

'No book is really worth reading at the age of ten which is not equally (and far often more) worth reading at the age of fifty– except of course books of information. The only imaginative works we ought to grow out of are those which it would have been better not to read at all.'

C.S. Lewis, 'On Stories'
in *The Cool Web*

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1 The imaginative and the informative in children's books

Nursery rhyme, fairy tale and language growth

Good books for the young present children with language that goes beyond the structures and vocabulary used in commonplace activity. Children enjoy rhyme, rhythmic language and playing with the sounds of language. Children do not need to understand a story fully; they may grow into an understanding of it and of its language after several hearings and readings. Young children enjoy Mother Goose rhymes, for instance, though it may be many years before they become interested in completely understanding these

rhymes or their background. A well-chosen edition of *Mother Goose* facilitates a shared investigation by adult and child so that the child may hear and say the language, discuss the illustrations and repeat the rhythms and rhymes.

Fairy tales introduce the child to a variety of simple story patterns. They present the child with special language conventions such as 'Once upon a time...' Listening to fairy tales gives the child a focus for concentrated listening, something that needs considerable practice in the early years.

Fairy tales, myths and legends (and all three are related in a number of important ways) also give children imaginative frameworks and provide them with a stock of culturally important, imaginative constructs; for example, *Cinderella*, the *Sleeping Beauty*, the stories of *Theseus* and *Beowulf* provide 'units of imagination' on which to draw. Calling someone a 'Cinderella' or a 'Theseus' draws upon these stories and their webs of imaginative possibilities to help describe people and attitudes to them. Writers as varied as Shakespeare, Charles Dickens and James Joyce have drawn upon the resources of fairy tale, legend and myth to produce further works of the imagination, and to make important comments upon human life. Children, too, draw upon these sources when they are given the chance to write their own stories.

Books and illustrations

The power of illustration has long been recognised. With the recent technical advances in printing and reproduction there is a wealth of illustrated work of high standard. The best of recent illustrators have given children illustrations that not only support and extend the meaning of the text, but also provide a rich and varied introduction to their culture's shared artistic tradition. Good

illustrations nourish the child's growing ability to discriminate visually, to name and to classify, as the relationships represented in the pictures and met with in the world are discussed.

The work of illustrators such as Janet and Allan Ahlberg, Mitsumasa Anno, Pat Hutchins, Errol Le Cain, Shirley Hughes, Charles Keeping, Richard Scarry, Maurice Sendak, Anthony Maitland and Brian Wildsmith has been acclaimed and each provides quite different styles of illustration and examples of the illustrator's art.* The work of Anno, Hutchins and Sendak has been significant in a number of ways. Anno has provided a number of books without words such as *Anno's Journey*, *Anno's Counting Book* and *Topsy turvies*. Each of these books, through its sequence of illustrations, gives the adult a large number of opportunities to discuss with a young child what is represented and to help the child construct stories that relate the sequence of pictures into coherent wholes. Anno's picture books invite shared imaginative activity between adult and child.

Since the late sixties, Pat Hutchins has published a number of books that are recognised as minor classics. *Changes, Changes* (a wordless picture book), *Rosie's Walk*, *Titch*, *The Surprise Party*, *Clocks and More Clocks* and *Goodnight, Owl!* have proved to be highly successful with children. Hutchins' stories make it easy for adults to discuss with children things and relationships in the physical world. Hutchins uses a variety of illustrative styles and her

* The following books include the work of some of these illustrators: *Thorn Rose* by the Brothers Grimm (illustrated by Le Cain), Garfield & Blishen's *The God Beneath the Sea* (illustrated by Keeping) and Leon Garfield's *Smith* and *John Diamond* (illustrated by Maitland). See bibliography for publishing details. All other illustrators appear as authors in the bibliography.

stories place a strong cognitive demand upon young readers, to which they respond with considerable pleasure.

Maurice Sendak is much more interested in the emotions that children experience. Books like *Where the Wild Things Are*, *In the Night Kitchen* and *Outside Over There* explore children's fears and jealousies. Children enjoy these books; they like both the language and the illustrations and respond to the ways in which the language and the illustrations are mutually supportive. With these books an adult and child may share an emotional experience and learn to talk to each other about it.

Any discussion of illustrators for children must include a reference to the work of Theodor Geisel who is better known as Dr Seuss. In books such as *The Cat in the Hat*, *The Lorax* and *The Five Hundred Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*, Dr Seuss has given examples of how language and illustration must support each other to produce stories to which children return and through which they learn the delight of independent reading.

Older primary children enjoy the illustrative work of Graham Oakley (*The Church Mice* series), the books of Raymond Briggs (*Father Christmas*) or the comics of Hergé (*Tintin*) and Goscinny (*Asterix*). Many also delight to Joseph Wright's illustrations of Frank Muir's *What-A-Mess* series.

Information books

The presentation of information in children's books has improved considerably in recent times. There has been a recognition of the significance of illustration, diagram, models, maps, text and layout. The best of information books show an understanding of the growth of a child's ability. There is a recognition of how slowly a child learns to draw upon information and how-to-do-it books.

Books that show how to do things help the child to learn how valuable books can be in our practical lives. Books such as Sarah Freeman's *Piccolo Picture Cookbook* can be introduced to children who cannot yet read. There has been a considerable development in the number of these how-to-do-it books for children in a variety of practical areas.

Information books, too, have undergone extensive developments. Some use a story frame to present facts. Eric Carle's successful *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* and Ted Greenwood's *V.I.P.: Very Important Plant* are good examples. Books that provide social and historical information facilitate shared examination and discussion by adults and children. Examples of this approach are Gian Paola Ceserani's *The Travels of Columbus* and Brian Williams' *Genghis Khan*, in the Piccolo Explorer Series. This series includes well-presented books on topics ranging from dogs to sea shells to airliners. Good information books are written in an easily understood language that introduces special terms very carefully. The style and placement of the illustrations support and extend the textual information.

The books mentioned here are examples of the standard of presentation required for a successful information book if it is to facilitate the acquisition of new and comprehensible information. As well as stimulating discussion, these books promote independent reading and help the child to extract useful information, leading to the development of research skills. They make it easy for the child to survey them, formulate questions and read with a conscious purpose.

CATS
TOPS AND BOTTOMS
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2 Beyond initial reading: developing the 'reading' child

Children need help in finding books that encourage independent reading. They need books that extend their language and stimulate their imagination. The books that help a child to independent reading have an important place in both the home and the classroom.

There are some books that are perennial favourites with children and adults. Good books for the young typically appeal to both adults and children. The works of A.A. Milne, Beatrix Potter, Andrew Lang, Hans Christian Andersen and the Brothers Grimm are a continuing source of delight to children. In recent years added

riches have become available in the books of Martha Alexander, Russell Hoban, Helen Nicoll and Robert Kraus. Books written and illustrated by the Berenstains provide entertaining stories through which children can begin to enjoy independent reading.

As children grow older, they enjoy longer stories that are more complicated in terms of plot, character and language. They continue to return to well-loved favourites since they do not always want to read at their most advanced reading level. At times they seek books that may appear too easy but that sustain their delight in reading.

In all the primary years children enjoy and still need to hear stories told and read that, without the oral interpretation of a skilled adult reader, they would find beyond them. They need books that may be read at a number of levels so that they gradually may come to grasp how active they must be in interpreting a work.

E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web* is a fine example of a story that may be enjoyed and understood on a number of levels as the child matures. *Charlotte's Web* formulates some of the central issues of life, death and moral values. Much of the best literature for the young initiates children into these aspects of human life.

As children grow up they remain relatively dependent upon the adult world. In story they can, in a sense, escape this dependence. They enjoy stories that describe individuals or groups of children able to take independent action. They are attracted to stories that highlight some of the weaknesses of adults. Roald Dahl's books, especially *James and the Giant Peach* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, are examples of stories that show adult

weaknesses in entertaining ways while giving their child heroes exciting roles to play. Children enjoy reading about characters who, like themselves, are small and, in terms of physical strength, weak. *The Wombles* (E. Beresford) and *The Borrowers* stories (M. Norton) are examples that delight children as these small heroes show themselves able to cope with the larger world.

The middle and upper primary years are crucial in the development of the 'reading individual'. A British authority on literature for the young, John Rowe Townsend, remarks that one can distinguish between the 'reading' and 'unreading' child. Townsend is not talking about the child who cannot read or who has difficulty in learning to read. His description is intended to draw our attention to the fact that, of the population of children who learn to read at some level, there are many who never come to enjoy it and who are thus denied access to the wisdom and knowledge that can be found in literary fictions. Such 'unreading' children are also denied access to those styles of language used in books but not encountered in oral exchange.

Another writer on children's books and reading, Aidan Chambers, reminds us that children need support in becoming 'reading children':

> Reading is hard work. Much harder work than experienced adult readers remember, for to them the hard work has become a pleasure, part of the thing they enjoy as a sportsman enjoys the physical effort involved in playing his game. *

* Aidan Chambers, *Introducing Books to Children*, Heinemann Educational Books, London, 1973, p. 3.

To become a 'reading individual', the child needs adult support throughout the primary years and beyond. Given a good knowledge of what is available, the adult can help the child to choose books that reward the effort required to read them. As well, adults can give the child a wide variety of ways of articulating responses to the books read.

As they grow older, children need help in becoming readers who can cope with the implied meanings of authors as subtle as Leon Garfield, William Mayne and Alan Garner. These are authors who require the reader to be intellectually agile and sensitive to what is and is not stated explicitly. The best books for the young require the reader to be able to perform flexibly and imaginatively; young readers must develop a 'repertoire of readership' from which a style of reading can be chosen to suit each book that is read. The ability to pick up various levels of meaning frequently needs support from an adult able to discuss stories with the child and point out clues that might otherwise be missed. From such clues the reader can note gaps in the story-telling where the author expects the reader to try out and decide among a number of possible completions. Frequently a child can learn this in the dramatic re-enactment of scenes from stories that allow the reader room to use imagination and share interpretation. Being a dramatiser of a powerful story gives the young reader a chance to experience the story both socially and actively. In being intellectually active and sensitive to the nuances of language and action, the child is not escaping into story, but enjoying the present fiction while preparing to interpret possible experience.

The emotions that stories evoke in children are very real experiences that encourage young readers to describe, discuss and

reflect on their own emotions. The American literary critic, Robert Penn Warren, has this to say:

> (Fiction is) an imaginative enactment. In it we find, in imagination, not only the pleasure of recognising the world we know and of reliving our past, but also the pleasure of entering worlds we do not know and of experimenting with experiences which we deeply crave but which the limitations of life, the fear of consequences or the severity of our principles forbid to us. Fiction can give us this pleasure without any painful consequences, for there is no price tag on the magic world of imaginative enactment. But fiction does not give us only what we want; more importantly it may give us things we hadn't even known we wanted. *

As the child matures, a knowledgeable adult may introduce authors, titles, questions and activities that add to the child's willingness to make the effort required.

Series books

For many children the development towards sensitive reading includes a time when they read and collect series books. They may become avid readers of Enid Blyton, the pony stories of the Pullein-Thompson sisters, the Hardy Boys, the stories about Trixie Belden and the books of Mary Calhoun and Capt. W.E. Johns. A recently published series, *Choose Your Own Adventure* (Bantam Books), has an innovative format that is currently proving very attractive to primary readers. Books like these give children the experience of becoming, to some extent, independent readers. In many cases, series books help children develop the habit and practice of reading.

Adult critics frequently object to series books but large numbers of children clearly enjoy them. Moreover, there are series books that adults can enjoy and that introduce young readers to a fuller literacy. The Narnia novels of C.S. Lewis are very successful in presenting the young reader with stories that may be interpreted at a number of levels, some of which deal with important moral issues. Given that children enjoy meeting old fictional friends, the stories of Beverley Cleary about Romona or of Helen Cresswell about the Bagthorpe family show that quality series books are possible.

Publishing details for all the books shown in* Children and Books *are contained in the bibliography beginning on page 33.

* Robert Penn Warren, 'Why Do We Read Fiction?', in *Introductory Readings in Literary Criticism*, Joyce S. Steward (ed.), Addison-Wesley, Menlo Park, California, 1968, pp. 149-150.

CAT AND MOUSE
Rodney Peppé
The Wandering Wombles
I Don't Feel Well!
YOUR CODE NAME IS JONAH
MEG'S CASTLE
The Borrowers
Mary Norton
John Brown, Rose and the Midnight Cat
ROALD DAHL
The Enormous Crocodile
with pictures by Quentin Blake
Frank Muir
What-a-Mess
Illustrated by Joseph Wright

3 Late primary years: the range is immense

In the upper grades of the primary school, children's interests widen, though some children are still in the process of becoming independent readers. Many still seek stories with familiar characters and plots; all benefit from stories that are read to them, especially stories that are just beyond their own unaided capacity.

In the upper grades the child can be encouraged to move from fairy tales to the legends and myths that introduce some of the roots of our culture's values and beliefs. Greek, Roman, Celtic and Norse myths and legends have provided the stimulus for a wide range of our culture's art, music and drama and the foundation for many of the recent novels for the young.

There is a long tradition of retelling various myths and legends in ways that make them accessible to the child in the upper grades of the primary school. The writings of Rudyard Kipling, Roger Lancelyn Green and Rex Warner give the teacher attractive versions for reading aloud. The Greek legends have been *re*-presented in books by Leon Garfield and Edward Blishen with the powerful illustrations of Charles Keeping. Their book, *The God Beneath the Sea*, retells the Greek myths in a vivid manner for the young who, particularly in these years, are attracted to the hero tale.

J.R.R. Tolkien, drawing upon northern European myth and legend, provides children with stories of epic quality that explore loyalty and a sense of duty towards 'the good' that is seen to be worth defending. Both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are stories from which passages may be read aloud. Like traditional legend and myth, Tolkien's stories provide encouragement to children to paint and sculpt, to write music and poetry, as well as to discuss the characters, plot and values that Tolkien presents so compellingly. In this vein of re-working myth and legend in a contemporary manner, the following writers are worth attention and are enjoyed by a large number of readers: Lloyd Alexander, Susan Cooper, Diana Wynne Jones, Ursula Le Guin and Patricia Wrightson.

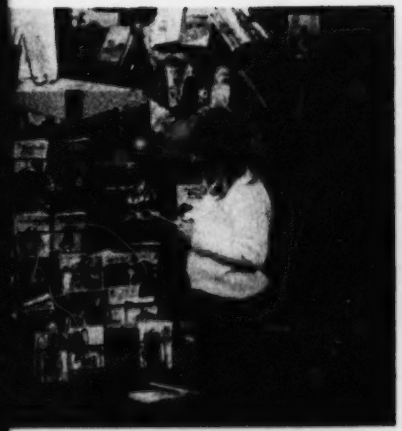
Not every reader wants to enter the 'secondary worlds of the imagination' produced by writers such as Tolkien. Many children in the upper primary grades still want to read stories that are close to their own actual worlds. Betsy Byars (*The Eighteenth Emergency, The Summer of the Swans, The Pinballs*), Rumer Godden (*The Diddakoi*), Gene Kemp (*The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tiler*) and Katherine Paterson (*Bridge to Terabithia, The Great Gilly Hopkins*) have written stories of this kind that both adults and children enjoy reading and discussing.

The novel as a literary form has always provided opportunities for moral, social and political commentary. Many novels for older children give introductions to current moral, social and political debate. Indeed, some give the young reader a background to urgent and recurring matters in the daily news. Richard Parker's *Snatched*, Peter Carter's *Under Goliath* and J.M. Marks's *Hijacked* are examples of this kind of story that can be both moving and informative.

Many recent works give the young reader the chance to experience imaginatively situations in which children and teenagers face difficult and dangerous decisions. Ann Holm's *I am David*, Ian Serraillier's *The Silver Sword*, Nina Bawden's *Carrie's War* and Jill Paton Walsh's *Dolphin Crossing* all show children coping with strife-torn times largely without adult help.

It is not surprising, perhaps, that in this century writers for children have been interested in time and our experience of it. Some writers, like Barbara Willard (*The Mantelmass stories*), Penelope Lively (*Going Back, The Ghost of Thomas Kempe*), Rosemary Sutcliff (*The Eagle of the Ninth, Song for a Dark Queen*) and Henry Treece (*The Viking Trilogy*) give readers access to events, values, emotions and people from our culture's past.

Other writers explore the possibility of time past and time present being interwoven in mysterious and intellectually stimulating



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ways. Nan Chauncy (*Tangara*), Philippa Pearce (*Tom's Midnight Garden*), Penelope Farmer (*Charlotte Sometimes*), Penelope Lively (*The Driftway*) and Ruth Park (*Playing Beattie Bow*) all have provided examples of the kind of fiction that gives rise to quite complex reflections upon the nature of time.

Children, of course, enjoy humour. Many writers have produced stories that adults and children can share with delight. Mary Rodgers (*Freaky Friday*, *A Billion for Boris*), Robert Leeson (*The Third Class Genie*), Mordecai Richler (*Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang*), Randolph Stow (*Midnite*) and Norton Juster (*The Phantom Tollbooth*) all have their supporters and provide stories from which readers enjoy sharing favourite passages.

Animal stories and those with personified animal characters have a long history in children's literature. *Black Beauty* (Anne Sewell), *Wind in the Willows* (Kenneth Grahame), *Tarka the Otter* (Henry Williamson) and *Watership Down* (Richard Adams) are notable examples. Young readers enjoy stories about the world seen through animal eyes, as well as those that describe the lives of animals.

One of the forms of literature that has enjoyed considerable, if contested, popularity among adult readers is science fiction. It is a form that provides escape from the limitations of the present while giving new perspectives on our current world and its shortcomings. John Christopher (*The Prince in Waiting Trilogy, The Tripods Trilogy, The Guardians*), Peter Dickinson (*The Changes Trilogy*), Robert Heinlein (*Citizen of the Galaxy*), Sylvia Engdahl (*Heritage of the Star*) and Madeleine L' Engle (*A Wrinkle in Time*) all present stories that raise moral and political questions in a manner that, while engaging the child's interest, encourages discussion of both the story and our world.

By the upper primary grades, many young readers are so competent that they enjoy being intellectually teased by word play, character choice and variety of narrative style. They enjoy the reading game when they read Helen Cresswell (*The Winter of the Birds, The Night-Watchmen*), Alan Garner (*The Owl Service*), William Mayne (*It, A Game of Dark*) and Ellen Raskin (*The Westing Game*). These authors present puzzles in ways that encourage the reader to form tentative interpretations that may be tested during the reading and subsequently examined and discussed with other readers.

Choosing books for children

The range of fictions for the young is now immense. The books and authors mentioned so far indicate, in part, that current wealth. The previous comment and discussion have used many of the criteria that need to be applied when selecting books for children.

When choosing suitable books the adult needs to consider the child's background, ability, interest and maturity. The suitability of a book depends, too, upon the particular purpose the adult has in mind when bringing it to a child's attention. Among the many purposes, here are some that have a high priority:

- to extend a child's language development in speech and writing;
- to show a young reader how to develop intellectual agility in making sense of stories;
- to show a child the different ways reading can be adjusted to suit different books and stories;
- to help a child to develop listening skills and focus attention;
- to help a child progress from passively receiving a story and information to actively anticipating how the story or information may turn out;
- to help a child develop a growing understanding of causal relationships in both the physical and psychological domains;
- to introduce a child to moral, social and political matters that form a crucial part of any mature understanding of human life and society;
- to help a child organise information in systematic fashion and increase the range and number of inter-relationships that can be noted and used in organising data;
- to introduce a child to our literary tradition with its store of imaginative expression and interpretations of human life and society;
- to help a child develop an enjoyment of acute and critical reading;
- to give a child an introduction to the nature, purpose and art of writing and some examples of the many forms that writing can take.

4 Poetry for children: the pleasure of language

There has been a tremendous growth in the amount of poetry written for the young. Changes to the topics and forms of much of that poetry reflect adults' changing views of both childhood and poetry.

The new verse is available in well-chosen and well-presented anthologies as well as in collections of the work of individual poets. It is significant how many writers of adult poetry currently write also for the young. Indeed some of the poetry written for the late primary and early secondary child is such that it gives rise to the old question: 'Written for children! What children?'

Not all the available poetry for children is new material. For young children in the early years, Mother Goose rhymes still provide a memorable introduction to rhythmic language and rhyme in examples that they can enjoy saying aloud. Mother Goose rhymes give young children oral practice that adds to their general language development. The rhymes appeal not only for their sound but also for the stories that are told through them. In *The Puffin Book of Nursery Rhymes*, Iona and Peter Opie provide adults with an exciting and varied collection that will enrich home and classroom. The Opie collection, like many similar ones currently available, helps adults to supplement their own childhood memories and gives access to the valuable cultural store of such rhymes.

With children throughout the primary grades, poetry is predominantly an oral art. It needs to be heard, said, repeated and sometimes sung. When the poetry is striking, children often like to memorise it. Occasionally, it may be set to music by the children or it may provide the basis for movement and drama.

Poetry uses a variety of language possibilities to an extent, or in ways, that prose does not. It uses metre, rhyme and rhythm in ways that exploit the child's joy in chant and game rhymes. Through an experience of poetry children come to appreciate how powerful language can be in expressing or evoking emotion and in stating views, attitudes and opinions about human life. It is instructive to note how Dr Seuss uses many rhythmic verse patterns, supported by carefully placed and sequenced illustrations, in order to hold the *ear* of the young listener and the *eye* of the young reader while engaging the child's imagination. Writers like Barbara and Ed Emberley in *Drummer Hoff*, Virginia Krahl in *The Duchess Bakes a Cake*, Charles Causley in *The Tail of the Trinosaur* and Roald Dahl in *James and the Giant Peach* all use, with considerable success, language patterns drawn from nursery rhyme and folk verse.

Nonsense verse, that resembles some folk rhyme, has a long tradition. The present generation has added the name of Spike Milligan to a list that includes Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, writers whose work has been acclaimed by several generations of adult and child readers. In this vein, the work of Shel Silverstein, in collections like *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, is another welcome addition to this imaginative tradition.

Eve Merriam, in two very valuable collections, shows how varied the topics for poetry can be. Merriam's poetry is enjoyable to read aloud and the general layout and illustration of her books are designed to support the child's pleasure in making meaning from the verse. Significantly, her collections are called *Out Loud* and *It Doesn't Always Have to Rhyme*. In these collections she not only plays with the possibilities of rhyme and rhythm but seeks to extend the range of stimulating comparisons that her readers can make and enjoy. Children learn their mother tongue because adults share its complex patterns with them. Eve Merriam presents children with poems that they can read aloud and use as models for their own writing of verse.

The work of Merriam and Silverstein makes it clear that poetry is not restricted to describing the beauty of the natural world or responses to that beauty. Both show that poetry can be written about anything that commands human attention. They give examples, too, of how ordinary language can be used to depict the particular and the unique.

Poetry describes the world the child hears, sees, touches, tastes and smells. The poetry of Mary O'Neill in *Hailstones and Halibut Bones* shows just how exact and concrete poetry for the young can be.

Poetry adds to the ways experience and emotions can be expressed and shared. Poetry can evoke similar responses in different people, in ways that establish a common humanity. Recent collections to which Michael Rosen has contributed (*You Tell Me* and *Mind Your Own Business*) provide many examples of this. Rosen's poetry describes, in a very sensitive manner, the joys and pains of finding room to grow up among the emotions and demands of others. Each poem in his collections invites readers to remember and articulate their own experiences of growing up and their encounters with others' views and expectations.

Poets like Charles Causley in *Figgie Hobbin* write a kind of poetry that engages children's joy, fear, sadness and sense of mystery. Causley's poems are examples of interesting stories with magical topics that can be discussed, illustrated, acted and spoken chorally. Such poetry moves beyond ordinary experience in ways that involve and stimulate children's imagination. Causley's sensitivity to children's interest in poetry is well represented in two recent anthologies, *The Puffin Book of Magic Verse* and *The Puffin Book of Salt Sea Verse*.

A well-chosen anthology is a crucial resource for adults seeking to introduce children to poetry. In 1979 Kaye Webb sought children's own selections of poetry in order to compile a helpful anthology for the primary years, *I Like This Poem*. It gives interesting examples of traditional, modern and contemporary poetry that children enjoy. A good anthology for children is the result of a wide acquaintance with what has been, or is being, written.

In recent years Leonard Clark has edited a significant series of collections of the work of contemporary poets for the young. His series *Chatto Poets for the Young* shows the changed understanding of what children enjoy in poetry and is a fine example of both publishing initiative and poetic quality. Poets as varied as Clive Sansom, D.J. Enright, Ted Hughes and John Heath-Stubbs have contributed to the series. Of these, the work of Ted Hughes in the collections *Meet My Folks* and *Season Songs* is particularly rewarding.

Over the last twenty years Ted Hughes has shown considerable interest in children's experience of poetry and in their writing. His *Poetry in the Making* is a major contribution in this area and combines well with works such as Robert Druce's *The Eye of Innocence*, Brian Powell's *Making Poetry*, S.M. Lane and M. Kemp's *An Approach to Creative Writing in the Primary School* and Sandy Brownjohn's *Does It have To Rhyme?* These books offer a background to any adult seeking to help children explore the possibilities of writing and poetry.

Adults need to know this range of possibilities especially with regard to children's poetry writing. Rhyme and metrical rhythms are only some of the possible options. Verse patterns such as haiku, tanka, cinquain and diamante give the young poet a sense of form and an early experience of success in marrying form and meaning. These forms lend themselves to group work that helps sustain children's interest in poetry writing.

Poetry, then, remains an oral and social art in the primary years. It gives opportunities for listening and speaking in which the class or group may share. Some poetry may be combined with movement, music and dramatic activity. Choral poetry, well organised to

retain the form of poems, can be a classroom delight as well as a good introduction to poetic form.

Poems like Edward Lear's 'The Owl and the Pussycat', Eve Merriam's 'Autumn Leaves' and Eleanor Farjeon's 'There are Big Waves' delight infant groups in choral activity. Spike Milligan's 'A.B.C.', Hal Summers' 'School is Out', C.J. Dennis' 'Hist!' and James McAuley's 'Tune for Swans' all present opportunities for speaking, listening, co-operating and discussing in the lower grades of the primary school.

Older children enjoy the mysterious in 'The Listeners' by Walter De La Mare or are attracted by the rhythm and drama of Charles Causley's 'Colonel Fazackerly' and Vachel Lindsay's 'Daniel'. Using quite a different form, Patricia Hubbell's 'House Moving', while requiring careful speaking, reveals something of how language can mimic physical effort and movement in the world.

Each of these poems provides an opportunity for children to note how saying and meaning are related. In reading poetry aloud in a class or group, each child can contribute to the poem's interpretation. But poetry can be quiet as well. It can give the individual the chance to notice how language can catch time in flight; it can hold up the fleeting experience of the world for reflection.

It cannot be said too strongly that the adult's appreciation of poetry will be the most important factor in helping a child to take pleasure in reading and writing poetry. The adult needs to be able to read poetry aloud well, and to place poetry in contexts where its relevance as a means of private and public expression becomes obvious to a child.

The child needs to encounter poetry that helps to articulate descriptions of, and responses to, recurring situations that everyone meets. Poems about the seasons, the weather, the classroom, the home and the playground are all relevant and need to be at hand. Poems about patterns of language and about imaginary worlds have their place, too, in the primary program.

Poetry presented to the young should include:

- nursery and folk rhymes
- poems and story poems with refrains and choruses
- ballads, story poems and songs
- humorous and nonsense verse
- poems that vividly describe objects, animals, people and events
- poems that can be enjoyed at a number of levels
- poems that evoke and describe emotions
- poems that encourage children to write and to join in a dialogue with other poets

Writing poetry should be an activity that is a frequent part of school life. Each child should be encouraged to find forms, topics and language that have appeal and to compose verse that contributes to the classroom conversation about the world and individual experience. This poetry then can be published in a variety of ways.

As far as possible, poetry should be included as a normal part of the overall classroom program. Children need to encounter poems that show a range of verse forms. Poetry should give the child examples of how to explore the possibilities of language.

Birds
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CHILDREN AND BOOKS

PARENTS, CHILDREN AND LANGUAGE

CHILDREN, LANGUAGE AND THE ARTS

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